

May 1927

JAPANESE WOOD BLOCK PRINTS
AND PAINTINGS BY ARTISTS
WHO ALSO DESIGNED PRINTS

SPECIAL EXHIBITION HELD
DURING THE MONTH OF MAY
IN GALLERY VI

Please do not remove
this catalogue from
the gallery

NEARLY EVERYBODY has a Japanese print, or has wanted one. Since the early eighties, quantities have been coming to the United States and Europe, while since that time Japan has been searched for them, regardless of artists, excellence or kind, in order that this demand might be appeased. Under the circumstances it was inevitable that many mediocre prints should find their way into the hands of Occidental admirers and collectors.

And inasmuch as mediocre Japanese prints, are, as a rule, technically good they have been universally cherished beyond their worth. That is to say, all Japanese prints are not fine prints- far from it- but the Occidental public has not discriminated between the technically good and the artistically fine. However, when once a fine Japanese print is actually seen and appreciated, both technically and artistically, there is never a question in the mind of the observer of its importance in the field of graphic art. Its equal has never preceded it, nor has its equal followed, either in the Occident or the Orient.

As examples of pure design they are important and as exponents of pictorial representation they are ~~not~~ perfect, while so beautifully are pure design and pictorial representation blended, it is hard to say where one ends and the other begins. It is this point, perhaps, more than any other, that makes the legion of fine Japanese prints stand preeminent among all the graphic arts of the world.

About 1650, this form of graphic art came into existence in Japan. First as religious posters or broad sheets. Later they flourished as book illustrations, and finally as single sheets of pictorial interest they captured the capital city of Japan and spread into country and remote parts until they were the rage. They were published, therefore, in great quantities.

They sold in the heyday of their existence for a penny or so apiece. Even when they were first introduced to the Occident they could be purchased for a few dollars. But today it is not an uncommon thing for a fine print to bring \$3,000 or even more.

Some very fine collections are owned in America, such as that of Mr. Spaulding of Boston, Miss Buckingham of Chicago, Howard Mansfield of New York, Mr. Schwabstadter of St. Louis, and fifty or a hundred others. There are collections which cost millions in American dollars in spite of the fact that only a few years ago a good print could be purchased for a few dollars.

Unfortunately, the Toledo Museum of Art owns no examples of these beautiful and unique examples of the great graphic art of the world. 'Tis a field not yet explored by us and yet a field of great possibilities. No greater pleasure can be experienced by the individual collector than the perusal, on a sunny Sunday morning, of portfolios of beautiful prints, nor does anything lend itself any better to the desire on the part of such a collector to share his pleasure with others.

It is hoped that this exhibition will not only afford pleasure and instruction to many who see it in the gallery, but may be the means of prompting someone to start collecting Japanese prints.

Mr. Tanaka of Yamanaka and Company, New York City, has lent this collection of prints. The artists represented in the order of their period are:

Kiyomasa

Masanobu

Harunobu

Toyonobu

Kiyoshige
Shunsho
Shigemasa
Kiyomitsu
Toshinobu
Kiyonaga
Kiyohiro
Kyosen
Utamaro
Koriusai
Hokusai
Shunyei
Toyokuni
Eishi
Shunko
Choki
Shuncho
Kuniyoshi
Sharaku
Hiroshige
Buncho
Shunsen
Kiyochika

The paintings are from the permanent collections in the Museum. They are hung in this print exhibition because every artist who designed prints was first and foremost a painter. Prints were produced from wooden blocks in quantity, sometimes three thousand from a single block before it was entirely discarded; therefore paintings by print artists are comparatively scarce. We are fortunate in having these few examples but they are not of the highest quality. The artists represented are:

Keishu

Keisai

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The two makimono (scrolls) on the East wall are lent by Mr. Mori of Chicago. They are of the finest quality, rare and important. The painter, Okumura-Masanobu (1690-1768) is one of the earliest painters of the School which produced the prints.

The subject represents the twelve months of the year, six in each scroll, and some one important event or festival of each month. Thus, is this painting artistically fine, and it is an important record of the customs of the early eighteenth century in Japan.



